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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Terry Goddard Calls for Federal and Statewide Reforms to Increase School and College Campus Safety

(Phoenix, Ariz. – Sept. 6, 2007) Attorney General Terry Goddard today called on federal and state leaders to address serious deficiencies in federal and state laws and educational policies that leave students vulnerable to violence in their schools and on college campuses.

Goddard released a 14-page report that includes specific recommendations addressing threat assessment practices, protocols for dealing with the mentally ill, information sharing among law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders, and crisis response planning and communications. The report was issued by the 27-member National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) Task Force on School and Campus Safety, of which Goddard is a member.

"I have met with presidents of Arizona universities to share with them the work of the NAAG Task Force and discuss school violence and safety issues as they relate to Arizona colleges and universities," Goddard said. "The efforts of all three universities are impressive. I believe the recommendations in this report will be constructive and helpful."

Recommendations from the Task Force include:

- All schools and colleges should establish a system whereby disturbing behavior is reported to an individual or multidisciplinary team of individuals with expertise and training in risk assessment that can assess the information received and put into action an appropriate response. Students, parents, faculty and other community stakeholders should be made aware of the reporting mechanism.
- State and federal lawmakers should examine privacy laws in an effort to remove barriers to effective information sharing. Appropriate state and federal agencies should clarify how information, including mental health records, can be shared under existing state and federal laws.

- States should modify or enhance state laws to ensure that all information that is relevant to federal firearms laws is shared with the National Instant Criminal Background System, especially for individuals disqualified from purchasing or possessing firearms for mental health reasons. The U.S. Department of Justice should provide clear guidance to jurisdictions on the scope of relevant records.
- State legislators should mandate that all schools and colleges that receive state funding create, maintain and update emergency management plans.
- Colleges should implement a multi-point, redundant communication system that leverages existing technology and provides information as quickly and to as many people as possible.
- Every school and college should have mechanisms in place to allow for the anonymous reporting of perceived threats by students or faculty. The system should include educational outreach and effective follow-up by trained professionals.
- States should continue to implement and expand bullying prevention measures, including cyber bullying.

“This report is not designed to comprehensively address all of the issues related to school and campus security but to identify some of the legislative and policy weaknesses that impact the safety of our educational institutions,” Goddard said.

A report is available on the Arizona Attorney General’s Web site at www.azag.gov.

The NAAG Task Force on School and Campus Safety was convened to update a 1999 report issued by NAAG to address issues surrounding school violence. Although much of the information in the 1999 report remains relevant, the ad hoc group was created to update recommendations and determine what issues were brought into sharper focus as a result of the tragedy at Virginia Tech.

“Campus security and safety are high priorities for Arizona universities,” Goddard said. “They have made progress on the key areas addressed by this report. Their work on these issues continues to be a priority and they welcome the ideas, resources and additional expert information made available by the NAAG Task Force.”

The NAAG Task Force on School and Campus Safety members are: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, District of Columbia, Georgia, Guam, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

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